



CHA Oversight Hearing on
“Impediments to Voter Enfranchisement”

Philadelphia City Hall, Room 405
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
October 5, 2007
10:00 AM

OPENING STATEMENT OF
Chairman Robert A. Brady

The hearing will come to order. Good morning, Members of the Committee, witnesses, and guests. I’m very pleased to bring the Committee on House Administration to Philadelphia today to discuss impediments to voter enfranchisement.

The right to vote and access to the polls are fundamental to our democracy. Since the nation was founded, we’ve expanded the

right to vote to include non-land owners, minorities, women, and 18 year olds. I am interested to learn how today's witnesses have overcome problems with casting ballots. I am also eager to hear their suggestions to improve the voting process.

In 2000, the nation and the world watched Florida's recount and the 30-plus days it took the Supreme Court to decide the outcome of the Presidential race. The problems with that election -- we all remember the punch card ballots with hanging or pregnant chads -- led to the passage of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). This committee had a lot to do with passing that bill.

Traditionally, states have paid the entire cost of running elections. States and counties have been forced to decide between funding the maintenance of roads, the construction of schools, or other vital programs. In 2002, for the first time in our nation's history, HAVA provided federal money to run Federal elections.

Here, in Philadelphia, we have seen plenty of attempts to disenfranchise poor and minority voters through intimidation and suppression tactics. I expect we will hear a few stories today. One of the worst stories I've heard, however, took place in Milwaukee's African American neighborhoods in 2004. Entire neighborhoods were blanketed with misleading flyers from a fictional 'Milwaukee Black Voters League'. These flyers falsely claimed that voters could be ineligible to vote if they violated traffic laws, if any family members had criminal records, or if they voted in a previous election that year. This sort of manipulation must be stopped.

Another voting obstacle threatens voters across the nation. A handful of States have increased ID requirements at the polls. In fact, the Supreme Court is set to hear a case this term on the voter ID issue. This Committee will pay close attention to that case. If these voter ID laws are upheld, poor, elderly, minority, and disabled voters will be discouraged from voting. Congress should

be working to ensure that every individual that is eligible to vote is enabled to do so. We should not be in the business of creating roadblocks for Americans who qualify to vote.

Dedicated public servants, volunteers, and community-based organizations like the ones we will hear from today have been helping to monitor and combat the problems voters face on Election Day. Additionally, this year the House of Representatives took a major step to prevent voter intimidation and misleading tactics by passing the Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Prevention Act. This legislation will go a long way to prevent misleading flyers and information from being distributed.

Overcoming these barriers and expanding opportunities to the voting booth are priorities for this Committee. We've got a lot of work ahead of us, but we're up for the challenge.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses.